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NEWS RELEASE

'IF IN DOUBT, LEAVE IT OUT'

PERSONAL FOOD IMPORTS CAMPAIGN VISITS THE SULEYMANIYE MOSQUE AND UK TURKISH ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTRE TRUST

People from East London were left in no doubt about the risks of bringing back food from abroad when a new government campaign came to Hackney on Saturday 27 November 2004.

The aim of the campaign, launched by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), is to raise awareness of the foods that cannot be legally brought back to the UK from outside the EU.

The campaign highlights the rules and restrictions that people need to know before they travel abroad, so that they do not run the risk of breaking the law.

Experienced staff were on hand to dispense up-to-date information on the campaign and explain the laws at **London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre Trust**, 212-216 Kingsland Road, Hackney. Leaflets and posters were available in several languages including Arabic, Chinese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Turkish, Urdu and English.

Deputy Mayor of Hackney, Jessica Crowe said: "It's vital that people are left in no doubt about the risks of bringing back food from abroad. We work closely with DEFRA to ensure that people are aware of the foods that cannot be legally brought back to the UK from outside the EU. We fully support the personal food imports campaign and hope that it brings the message home."

Hackney marks the ninth stop on a national tour by the roadshow, following the campaign's official launch. The campaign aims to visit more than 30 places up and down the UK including Birmingham, Bradford, Liverpool, Manchester and Brighton over the next six months.

Food and Farming Minister, Larry Whitty said:

"People may not see any harm in bringing food back to the UK when they return from a holiday or a business trip, but some foods may contain pests and diseases that threaten the health of our agricultural crops and livestock, as well as public health. Because of these risks, there are strict restrictions on foodstuffs brought back from countries outside the EU.

“I would urge everyone to check the rules before they leave the UK. If you are caught breaking them, then you may face long delays, prosecution and a fine.”

The visit of the mobile unit was timed to coincide with a Halal food safety seminar, taking place at the Mosque from 1.30pm, The purpose of the seminar was to educate traders and consumers about food safety issues relating to Halal food. Speakers on the panel included representatives from the London Borough of Hackney, the Food Standards Agency, the Health Protection Agency and the Muslim Council of Britain.

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Notes to Editors:

- Controls on food imports are essential to protect public health and livestock and the government is committed to reducing the risks of disease entering the food chain via illegally imported food products. Measures to raise public awareness and improve preventative measures at the UK border and inland are backed by £25 million from 2003-06.
- The current legislation makes it illegal to bring back meat and milk-based products for personal use into the UK from countries outside the EU. Other restrictions depend largely on the country one is travelling from, the type of food products brought back and the quantity. Enforcement activity has also been stepped up at ports and airports. In 2003/04, over 16,000 seizures of illegally imported food, amounting to over 180 tonnes were made.
- For detailed information on products that can/cannot be brought into the UK, call the Defra helpline on 08459 33 55 77 or check the database on the Defra website at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/illegal/default.htm>
- The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for policy issues relating to imports of products of animal origin, plants and plant products.

For further information about this event and if you would like the unit to visit your local area, please contact Media Moguls on 020 8902 5575 or:

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